

# Indiana House of Representatives

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## News and Information

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### **STATEHOUSE REPORT FROM REP. BOB BISCHOFF**

INDIANAPOLIS – As we enter the final two weeks of the 2006 session of the Indiana General Assembly, it appears we have succeeded in keeping local riverboat revenues in our hands.

Over the past two sessions, there have been several attempts to take millions in riverboat dollars away from places like Dearborn, Ohio and Switzerland Counties. This is support that has helped us improve our schools and local roads and bridges. Without it, many years of progress in our area would have been halted.

This is an issue that has concerned me – as well as Sen. Johnny Nugent – for some time, and I want to thank the senator for helping me make the case for preserving local riverboat revenue to fellow lawmakers and the governor. Our work appears to have been successful this year, but we will keep a careful eye on this issue in the closing days of this 2006 session to make sure our riverboat dollars stay in local hands.

We have reached the time when many Statehouse observers feel the real legislative work begins.

Here is what we have accomplished to this point. In early February, members of the Indiana House finished work on bills that started in this chamber. This week, representatives completed deliberation of legislation sent to us from the state Senate. While we were on that schedule, senators were doing the exact opposite: action on Senate bills early in the session, followed by House bills in February.

Now comes time for House-Senate conference committees, where the two chambers try to reach agreements on individual bills. I want to take some time this week to explain this part of the process, because this is when we try to settle our differences on major issues in a session.

To show you how the legislative process works at this time of year, let me use some examples from this session.

If a bill makes it through both chambers without changes, it automatically goes on to the governor for final action. House Bill 1049, which increased the penalties for neglect of a dependent if the crime results from the use of cocaine or meth, was approved by the House earlier this year, then passed by the Senate with no changes. The legislation now awaits the governor's signature.

Only a very few bills manage to make it through the process cleanly. Many of them make nothing more than technical changes in existing laws to update the state code. For instance, House Bill 1134 contains 361 pages of revisions to education finance laws. Some of those changes simply consist of adding a comma here or removing a word there.

If a bill is changed in any way in the second chamber, it must return to the first chamber to get approval for those changes. The author of the measure can agree to the changes (called a concurrence) or disagree with the changes and file a dissent.

In the House this week, representatives chose to concur with the changes senators made to House Bill 1279, which will pave the way for deregulation of the state's telecommunications industry. Supporters of this legislation believe it will increase competition among phone, cable and Internet providers and expand voice, video and data choices for consumers. Opponents contend that deregulation will reduce the quality of service to customers and cause unchecked increases in charges. The issue now rests in the hands of the governor.

Then there are the bills that have generated the most attention this session, such as the governor's plan to sell the Indiana Toll Road to finance a road improvement program (House Bill 1008) and efforts to provide property tax relief for home and business owners (House Bill 1001).

The House and Senate have approved radically different versions of these two bills. It is a given that both will be sent to conference committees, which consist of two representatives and two senators who are charged with reaching some sort of agreement on a measure.

Sometimes the differences are minor, and the conferees reach a quick agreement. They sign a committee report, which must be approved by a constitutional majority in both the House and Senate before going to the governor.

When it comes to major issues, though, negotiations can take a while. My sense is that conferees will debate both the toll road sale and property tax relief up until the end of the 2006 session on March 14. Some senators already have raised the possibility that we may need a special session to resolve differences on the toll road deal.

Let me give you an update on two bills that have been approved by the House, but need final consideration in the Senate before heading to the governor. Senate Bill 5 increases the penalty for disorderly conduct if the crime takes place within 500 feet of a funeral, burial or memorial service. Senate Bill 6 requires anyone convicted of child molestation to be placed on lifetime parole when that person's imprisonment has ended.

Finally, House Democrats were able to stop an effort by the House majority to pass right-to-work legislation in Indiana. If this plan had become law, unions throughout the state would have been eliminated and I believe workers would have seen their wages and benefits reduced drastically. Thanks to the strong opposition from House Democrats, this proposal was defeated by nearly a two-to-one margin.

If you need to reach me during these last two weeks of the 2006 session, you can call me on the toll-free Statehouse telephone number of 1-800-382-9842, e-mail me through my Internet web site at [www.IN.gov/H68](http://www.IN.gov/H68) or write to me in care of the Indiana House of Representatives, 200 W. Washington St., Indianapolis, IN 46204.

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